

Distribution at Galleries, Museums, and Media Centers. Ingrid Weigand

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Although this article focuses on the distribution of videotapes through museums, media centers and gallery types of distributors, all the discussions recorded here were colored by references to broadcast television, cable TV and the future of Beta/VHS, because each of these is affecting the way these organizations deal with video artists' works. From this material, it appears that the distribution of these works is in a state of transition, as much because of changes in the vision of many artists as from revisions in the marketing approaches of some distributors.

Accordingly we will look at the museum situation with John Hanhardt (Whitney Museum), Richard Simmons (Everson Museum), David Ross (Berkeley University Art Museum) and Barbara London (Museum of Modern Art); the gallery type of distribution provided by Patricia Brundage (Castelli/Sonnabend), Anna Canepa Video Distribution, and Howard Wise (Electronics Arts Intermix); and the media centers with John Reilly (Global Village), RoseLee Goldberg (The Kitchen) and Henry Baker (Synapse).

In museums, the developing pattern is that of creating video shows for travel to other institutions: museums, galleries, colleges and libraries, for example. These are not necessarily shows as presented at the originating museum, but coherent groupings of tapes which the curator has shown individually or in other contexts. All charge an artist's fee for the show, usually between \$25 and \$50 per artist in a group show, per exhibiting institution. Museums do not rent or sell individual tapes (although they may travel a show of an individual artist's work), but all are careful to turn all inquiries over to the artist or his dealer. Access to curators is simple - videomakers send their tapes, (with return postage) which the curators normally view within a week or two. Most curators are very conscientious about looking at tapes which are professionally made with serious aesthetic intent, although none have much patience with student or amateur work. Whether they show a tape or not is normally a matter of personal aesthetics and curatorial objectives at a given time, rather than politics.

Whitney Museum

John Hanhardt, Curator of Film and Video at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

We have been working with the American Federation of Arts (one of the principal organizations that tours shows of art throughout the U.S.). Since last year, they have been distributing a "History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema" which we put together for them, and now we are preparing the first video section ever to appear in the AFA catalog. It will be an "Introduction to Video", and will cover a variety of directions. In the future, we will probably add other groupings of videotapes.

The tapes are rented by universities and colleges, where video is becoming part of the curriculum. Another big group are libraries, with the Donnell Branch (of the N.Y. Public Library) in the forefront. Libraries as renters, buyers and promoters of video are happening all over the country. It was a radical idea that people could take films out of their library. Videotapes in libraries are extensions of that idea.

Beta/VHS will affect this pattern, because people are going to realize that they can have a new relationship to television. As people become aware that they can put variety in their home, a small but expanding audience will develop for video art. It is true that people will be able to buy old films for a lot less, but they are not going to find the stimulation that video art can provide, and they are going to be

predisposed to spend more on artists' videotapes.

Everson Museum

Richard Simmons, Curator for Film and Video, Everson Museum (Syracuse).

I'm putting together an Everson Museum Video Anthology, although I haven't worked out the specifics for its distribution. We also publish a catalog of all the video shows we do and send it around to other institutions to interest them in the show and the artist.

I see a real division occurring in video art that is caused by artists getting access to broadcast television. There are still people who treat video as an aesthetic medium, with no thought of meeting any external standards, and there are others for whom making a tape is to make a 28-minute, 370-second program. But I think the best video art is work that is made to be art, because it's the right medium for what the artist wants to do at that time.

I don't see a big future for video art on Betamax. I find it difficult to foresee people collecting video art. It's too esoteric for the general public, and without the public you can't bring the price down because the artists still have to be compensated. Even synthesized art, which had a certain popular appeal, is being superseded right here in Syracuse, by Cable Channel 29, which will play FM music through a video synthesizer 24 hours a day. On the other hand, we are leasing a channel together with Synapse and the Syracuse University Student Center, on which we will have video art 12 hours a day. I'll be repeating, two days a week, a single program, 12 hours at a time. That way, different people can turn to it at different times.

University Art Museum/ Berkeley

David Ross, Director of the Berkeley University Art Museum.

It's been my attitude that as a museum we should distribute through museum channels. I distribute tapes in shows representing a regional survey, or a particular idea, or an individual artist. I send them out with a catalog, and often arrange for artists' lectures. I charge a fee for each artist. The audience for tapes has gotten much larger as more museums and galleries consider video reasonable. Video is shown wherever contemporary art is exhibited, both here and abroad. Requests are usually for 'video art' or for specific video artists, rather than for any style or area of video.

Nevertheless, I don't think that the system has developed so that any video artist can live on the distribution of his work. There is a greater involvement of cable and broadcast, but this has only benefited a very few of the artists working in the medium. I don't see how artists can ever be broadcast in numbers, because good work is always the result of artists working out of their own heads, not to any other standard or audience requirements. The real future for video artists will arrive when viewers can find whatever they want because it's all available-sports, porn, and video art-so that the audience for video art can find it.

Museum of Modern Art

Barbara London, Assistant Curator for Video, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

I have begun packaging videotapes to travel to other institutions. I think it will encourage the exhibition of videotapes. Right now there are very few curators in this country who can devote the kind of time that's required to inform yourself about video art. So if they can get tapes organized for them by an institution like the Modern, it's a comfortable way for them to show video. My main problem right now is finding out just how much to charge for a show-enough for a reasonable artist's fee, but not so much that the cost is prohibitive to the renting institution.

I think Betamax will be very important for video art. In the future I see it being sold in museum shops. Then, when people have Betamax at home, they will be much more likely to go to the museum shop and buy a copy of a tape they have just watched, just as they now go to buy a print or a book about a show they have just seen.

Video distributing organizations may or may not exhibit their videotapes to the general public, but they represent video artists and get their work sold or rented, sharing the income above expenses with the artist on a percentage basis. Distributors are much harder for artists to reach, both because they each have about as many artists as they can handle, and because as dealers, they make a long-term commitment to an artist whose work they accept. Thus they tend to select from artists whose work they know, and from artists recommended to them by those in their "stable."

Electronic Arts Intermix

Howard Wise, President, Electronics Arts Intermix.

We lease tapes, either for a one-time use (at \$50 per half-hour tape) or for the life of the tape (at \$175 for a half-hour tape). We lease almost entirely to institutions-libraries, art schools, universities and museums.

The big growth is in libraries that have video equipment and are building libraries of video art. In addition we have a small number of advertising companies that want to keep their staff up on video art, and a few business organizations, like banks, who are interested.

One of our main purposes is to enable the artist to earn money from his work. Cable companies have not yet been a market. We are starting to make artists work available on Betamax, but we have to solve the problem of pricing, and of getting rights to material within the tapes. The price-differential between a video artists work and a recycled film in the public domain is enormous: \$29.95 for a film feature vs \$175 for a half hour tape. But home video is the opportunity for video artists. Our job is to gain as large an audience and as much of an impact as we can for the artist. With home video we will have an input comparable to public broadcasting.

Castelli/ Sonnabend

Patricia Brundage, Director, Casteltil Sonnabend Films and Videotapes.

Video equipment like Betamax, being in the house, being able to play different tapes, that is creating an audience, but it is very small. For the most part, our tapes are distributed to the same places they have always been, mostly by rental: to schools, museums and such. The main difference is that there is much more interest outside of Europe and the U.S., especially in Australia and Iran, as well as Israel. Distribution will depend on what the artists really want to do to reach an audience. Technology is becoming a factor, both because artists are emphasizing it and because people who have come to video art more recently expect more quality in terms of mechanics. And people will watch video at home differently from the way they view it in a gallery or museum. It will become more ordinary, like an audio record.

Anna Canepa

Anna Canepa, Director, Anna Canepa Video Distribution.

I prefer to sell rather than rent tapes because it is the same amount of work, so I charge almost the same for rental as for sale. I also have a small space where my artists can present performance works. Critics write articles about the shows and that is good for the artists.

I really consider video a system of communication rather than a gallery art form. I don't believe in art per se, but art as a means of communication. Video is the medium, art is the language. Video is a chance to invent another system of communication ... Broadcast is something the serious artist will find, while still maintaining his own language. It is the real world. Betamax will become important in video distribution over the next couple of years.

Global Village

John Reilly director of the Global Village Video Resource Center, an organization that operates as the Video Department of the New School, runs video workshops, exhibits artists' videotapes and produces artists' documentaries for broadcast television.

One of the problems until now has been that video is distributed as if it has a general audience, when in fact each area, and in some cases, each tape, has a specific audience. We have been so successful distributing our documentary, "Giving Birth", because we got a number of mailing lists specific to people who would be interested in it, and sent out several thousand brochures. Even so, almost three-fourths of our sales were on film (from a tape-to-film transfer). Nevertheless, I think that, especially for documentaries, finding the audience is crucial for tape sales. Remember, that in most cases, the documentary made by an independent videomaker is often the best thing that has ever been done in the field. You know who is buying the Raymonds' "Police Tapes?" Police and other law enforcement agencies. It's not only a good work for the public, it's also the best work on the subject around.

So now we are going to start distributing other documentaries on this basis-presenting each to their specific audiences and we'll see how it goes. I don't think we will get involved in Betamax yet. Eventually it will be possible to make a work for a limited audience that makes money, but first you have to have a general audience of tens of millions for that limited audience to exist. I wouldn't hold my breath.

The Kitchen

Rose Lee Goldberg, Media Curator of The Kitchen, a media center where video and contemporary performance works are presented. The Kitchen includes a Lecture Bureau for artists who have shown their work there. The video program includes videotape series and installations, and a Video Viewing Room where weekly programs of tapes such as the oeuvre of a single artist or tapes on a single subject shown on an announced schedule. What we are developing are shows that are curated around an idea. Then we will travel those shows to different institutions. The whole problem with video- its limited acceptance- it is random programming, so that the public still doesn't know what its looking at. The gallery circuit is one where video work is shown like a painting. You don't watch television randomly like you look at paintings. Television is programmed so you know what kind of program you're watching and the context that it's being presented in. Our "Made for TV" show consists of a diverse group of tapes, but they are presented in a context that considers their appropriateness for television. Now, that judgment will be different for each viewer. Yet, by creating that context, each viewer can still look at these tapes in a coherent way. I think in this way, even the most difficult tapes can be made accessible on some level.

We do pay artists a fee for exhibiting, and we charge an artist's fee for shows we travel: more for a show of an individual artist: less per artist if it is a group show, but always as much as we can pay. We are not committed to any specific style or artist, but present a broad range of work, including the work of artists outside of the States, such as Canadian and English artists, whose work is not well known here.

Synapse

Henry Baker, director of the Synapse Video Center, which provides a two-inch quad post-production facility for selected visiting artists, and exhibits their work.

This year Synapse has gone seriously into the distribution business. At this time, we are still experimenting, working things out. In the meantime, we are letting cable systems like Manhattan Cable show a series of our tapes at no charge. We're not going to continue that. We're fed up with providing free material. From now on, the only free arrangements will be made with places prestigious enough to benefit the artist and Synapse. We are working with PBS, with regional networks, and we're working up to national networks. PBS station WXXI in Rochester ran our tapes-a twenty-week series of half-hour works-last summer, and wants to rerun them.

Our tentative fee scale will be \$50 per week per tape for cable and somewhere around \$190 per tape for public television stations, plus dubbing costs. We expect that from 50 to 75 per cent of the fee will go to the artist, the balance to Synapse for the cost of the distribution program. We will also develop distribution for closed circuit situations like libraries, colleges and museums. We plan to be on a paying basis by January 1979.